



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 8

1595 Wynkoop Street
DENVER, CO 80202-1129
Phone 800-227-8917
<http://www.epa.gov/region08>

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MAY 01 2008

Honorable Jon Tester
United States Senator
19 Second St. East, Suite E
Kalispell, MT 59901

Dear Senator Tester:

Thank you for your letter of January 15, 2008, on behalf of Mr. D.C. Orr of Libby. I appreciate this opportunity to respond to a number of Mr. Orr's statements. The following information will clarify EPA's past and planned actions and our rationale for them.

Mr. Orr asserts that EPA's clean-up work in Libby is "without scientific basis." Since first becoming aware of the situation in Libby in 1999, EPA has spent more than \$20 million on scientific studies designed to better understand the toxicity of the Libby form of amphibole asbestos (referred to as Libby Amphibole, or LA) and how people are exposed to it. For fiscal year 2008, EPA will spend over \$7 million to support ongoing toxicity and exposure studies and other site investigations. Nothing we have learned in the past nine years has convinced us that our work is not appropriate to address the risks to public health in Libby. Quite to the contrary, the meaningful data we have developed through these studies show that exposures can cause asbestos-related disease. The residential cleanups that we completed are performed under the most exacting standards and are, of course, intended to reduce any potential for exposure to asbestos fibers. We believe that they accomplish that goal.

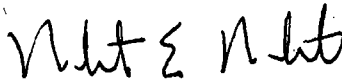
Mr. Orr asserts that EPA committed to "be gone in three years." To my knowledge, no one at EPA has ever made this claim. The Libby Asbestos Superfund site is one of the most complex and challenging sites in the United States. We are doing everything we can to expedite our work in Libby, but even now we cannot state with certainty how long it will take to complete the job. We are committed to moving forward as rapidly as possible, while still taking all the steps necessary to protect human health and the environment.

Mr. Orr asserts that EPA stated that "low-dose short-term exposure to Libby Amphibole is not a health concern." Again, I have no knowledge of anyone from EPA making this claim. EPA has always urged caution in dealing with any asbestos-containing material. Clearly, low-dose, short-term exposures are less risky than higher doses or exposures of longer duration. The scientific studies now underway or planned for the future will help us to better understand the relative risk from different asbestos exposure scenarios.

As we move toward our decision document on what the ultimate cleanup for Libby ought to be, the public, including Mr. Orr, will have the opportunity to comment in writing on our proposed plans. We are required to prepare a responsive summary to all public comments at that time.

We appreciate your concern for the people of Lincoln County and your continuing interest in EPA's clean-up efforts at the Libby Asbestos Superfund site. I hope this information will be useful in your response to Mr. Orr. If you or your staff have questions or need anything further, please contact me or Sandy Fells, our Regional Congressional Liaison, at 303-312-6604.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "R. E. Roberts", written in a cursive style.

Robert E. Roberts
Regional Administrator